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NEW YORK TIMES
11 March 1987

Cruz, Contra Chief Who Quit, Says Aim Is to Force Changes

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Special to The New York Times

SAN SALVADOR, March 10 — Arturo Cruz, the senior Nicaraguan rebel leader who resigned Monday, said today that he hoped his departure would "shake up" American and rebel officials and force them to face the necessity of fundamentally reorganizing the guerrilla movement.

"I hope my resignation will convince people that the need for reform is more radical, more urgent than ever," Mr. Cruz said in a telephone interview from Costa Rica. "Unless there is deep reform, the problems of the Nicaraguan opposition will go on."

A Contradictory Career

Mr. Cruz appears to have succeeded in provoking a strong reaction, prompting American officials Monday to ask other rebel leaders in Costa Rica to enter into negotiations to create a new directorate for the United Nicaraguan Opposition, according to two rebel officials. They said the negotiations were expected to be extremely difficult.

Mr. Cruz's gesture of resigning from the directorate in order to demand reforms is characteristic of the contradictory career of a man who served first as a top Sandinista official and then became one of the Sandinistas' leading opponents.

Such sharp turnings appear to reflect both Mr. Cruz's own mercurial character and the hard choices many Nicaraguans have faced as their country has plunged into war and revolution.

Despite his indecision and shifts in course, Mr. Cruz acquired a reputation as a man worthy of respect among foreign diplomats and American members of Congress. He said today that "part of my tragedy is that I am not a politician." Yet he appears to have forced American officials to reconsider their actions and those of the rebel movement they have backed.

Still Opposed to Sandinistas

Mr. Cruz said he remained a firm opponent of the Sandinistas, whom he condemned as "totalitarians and dictators," adding that he would continue to press for "a democratic solution" in his country. But he conceded that Nicaragua's history suggested that authori-

tarians, not democrats, have the upper hand.

"I feel tremendously frustrated because we Nicaraguans are going in circles," Mr. Cruz said. "We started in 1977 with one dictatorship, only to have a new dictatorship led by the Sandinistas emerge in 1979. It would be terrible to create a new dictatorship if we defeat the Sandinistas. For me it is the duty of Nicaraguan democrats to see this does not happen."

Mr. Cruz said he had found, after two extremely difficult years, that he could not force reform from within the rebel movement. As a result, he said, he had chosen to publicize the necessity of changing the rebel leadership, conduct and political program by resigning as publicly and as loudly as possible.

Mr. Cruz, who is 63 years old, said he had joined the United Nicaraguan Opposition rebel movement in 1985 at the strong urging of American officials, who promised that his entry would mark a serious effort to broaden and democratize a guerrilla opposition dominated by former followers of the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

Confrontation With 'Clique'

Mr. Cruz said he had spent the time since in bitter confrontation with a "clique" led by Col. Enrique Bermúdez, the military commander of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force rebel army, and by Adolfo Calero, the group's political leader. He condemned the Reagan Administration for allowing the Nicaraguan opposition to be controlled by military commanders and rightist politicians, who were originally chosen by the Central Intelligence Agency.

"The problem is that the United Nicaraguan Opposition is a vehicle that the clique of the F.D.N. never let function," Mr. Cruz said, using the Spanish initials of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. "The United States, by its indecision and ambivalence, supported the F.D.N. It did not push for reforms."

In describing the problems he faced inside the rebel movement, Mr. Cruz recounted an incident on his last visit to Honduras three months ago to visit Nicaraguan refugees along the border. He said he found that followers of Mr.

Calero had threatened several refugees, telling them that if they supported or even talked to him food supplies and other aid would be cut off.

Mr. Cruz said he believed a new political directorate should be elected by an assembly made up of leading Nicaraguan exiles representing all major political factions and also including rebel fighters.

"We need a strong, unified directorate," Mr. Cruz said. "It can't be made up of puppets."

But he conceded that creation of a unified leadership for the badly divided rebel movement would be difficult. He said he believed the new leaders would emerge from discussions between six key rebel figures.

These, he said, would include Mr. Calero and Colonel Bermúdez. Others would be Alfredo César, an independent exile leader in Costa Rica, and Brooklyn Rivera, a Miskito Indian leader who has been isolated by the Central Intelligence Agency over the years. In addition, Mr. Cruz said, Alfonso Robelo and Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, now serving as rebel directors, would be key negotiators.

The problem, Mr. Cruz conceded, is that several of these exile leaders have strongly opposed one another on political and personal grounds for the last five years.

"The contras have to show that they don't just want to win power but that they want democracy," he said. "I left because I found that there was not political will to make changes, but I believe that others will try to bring reform and I hope they are successful."